

▼▼▼ To the Students

If you have an African heritage, this book is your story. It should help you understand who you are. You can be proud of your story. African-Americans have made great contributions to both the state and nation. Your ancestors included pioneers, artists, writers, cowboys, brave soldiers, successful businesspersons, doctors, teachers, college professors, political leaders, and plain hard working people who survived against terrible odds.

There is also much for which to be very thankful. You will learn of people who struggled to give you a chance to read and to reach for the stars. Many of your ancestors never had those kind of chances themselves. But you do because of what they did. You should not forget that. You should take full advantage of what they fought to give you.

If your ethnic background is not African, you may think that this book has no value for you. You would be wrong. There are several reasons why the story of African-Americans in South Carolina should be important to you. First, it is important if you consider yourself a South Carolinian. As you will learn, the place we call South Carolina has been created by the blending of several cultures.

One of the main ingredients is African culture. South Carolina's cultural blood is partly African blood. If you like to sit on the front porch, if you eat "goobers," if you "sweet talk" someone, if you listen to jazz or rock and roll or the blues, you are doing things with a very heavy African flavor.

Second, the story is valuable so that we learn not to repeat the mistakes of the past. We cannot change the mistakes of our ancestors. But we can avoid repeating them. As much as African-Americans contributed to the state, contributions could have been greater had they been given a greater chance. Many brilliant people were lost to the state because they felt they had no chance here. They left. They made contributions to other states. We lost and were left poorer as a state. The point is not to feel guilty for mistakes of forefathers. The point is to be brave enough to acknowledge what was done and understand that we can make things different. If we are to live together and prosper, a good place to start is by learning about each other. We can learn, respect, and prosper. Or we can ignore, disrespect, and fight. The choice is yours.